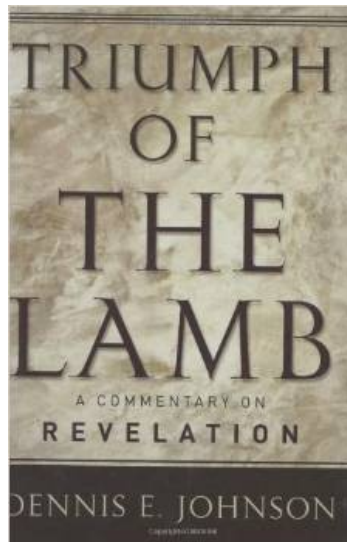


## Understanding the Book of Revelation, 15 pgs

Derived from the most accurate commentary on Revelation I know,  
Triumph of the Lamb, 2001 by Dennis Johnson



The revelation of REVELATION.

(1) **how the meaning of passages is disguised or used to point to Christ and his work,**

*1:1 The revelation<sup>A</sup> of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show<sup>A</sup> His slaves the things that must take place quickly, and He signified,<sup>B</sup> having sent forth through His angel to His servant John,<sup>2</sup> who testified to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ—to all that he saw.<sup>C</sup> <sup>3</sup>Blessed is the one reading, and the one hearing the words of this prophecy and keeping the things having been written in it, for the time is near. **Rev.1:***

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<sup>A</sup> *Revelation, Gk. **Apocalypse**, refers to the removal of a veil or covering. The purpose is “to show” (1:1) so what had been concealed and hidden is no longer secret as in unseen or unknown, though it may remain a mystery as in puzzling or unexplained.*

<sup>B</sup> ***Signify means to communicate by using symbols** – to symbolize in a stylized manner, ie, made to conform to a particular style or format – that style being the fantastic images, scenes, beasts, and battles of **apocalyptic literature**. In Revelation as in many other places in the Bible **things are not what they seem**. The true character of events, individuals, and forces, is quite different than it appears on the observable physical plane. Symbols such as **the harlot Babylon (Rev.17)** exactly represent the true nature of the subject. Revelation’s symbols make things appear as they really are. God portrays them to emphasize their wickedness and his way of defeating it. Smyrna appears poor but is rich; Sardis has a reputation for life but is dead; **it appeared** that nothing could prevent **the red dragon** from devouring the woman’s child (**Rev.12**), but *the child was caught up to God and to his throne.**

***A symbol is figurative language such as a visual metaphor** [word substituted for what is actually being spoken of]. One common metaphor in the NT is the word **blood** used in referring to*

Christ's **death** to connect it to the sprinkling of the blood for cleansing required by OT animal sacrifices (**Heb.9:11-14; 1 Jn.1:7**). A halo or rays of light emanating from the head representing holiness, deity, and the divine is a common symbol in paintings. Many of the symbols in Revelation are dynamic with moving pictures like changing scenes in a movie. Sometimes the symbols are explained - *the seven lampstands [represent] the seven churches* (**Rev.1:12, 20**).

<sup>c</sup> The visual mode of the message "to show" (1:1) or "he saw" (1:2) is used 52 times of John in Revelation combined with what he heard (1:10; 22:8) represents first-hand knowledge.

**So Rev.1:1** actually says that Jesus disclosed the deep realities of many of the very things the NT had already clarified (*made known*, **Eph.1:7-9** below) by communicating them on a visceral level in the form of apocalyptic images and scenes. **In other words, Jesus both revealed truth by giving John visions and kept it secret by encoding it in symbolic form.** It's like a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma or an autostereogram - a single-image stereogram designed to create the visual illusion of a three-dimensional scene from a two-dimensional image (aka **Magic Eye**). The illusion is one of **depth perception** arising from the different perspective each eye has of a three-dimensional scene. Not everyone can see the 3-D image.

**Eph.1:** <sup>7</sup> ... in Whom we have the redemption ... <sup>9</sup> having **made known to us the mystery** of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself.

Most translators don't recognize a difference between the Gk word translated "signify" (1:1) and the common word for imparting knowledge, *make known* (**Eph.1:9**). Some translations that do make this distinction are DLNT, YLT, NTE, WYC, ASV, KJV, NKJV (*biblegateway.com*). **EHV** has *Christ expressed this revelation by means of symbols* ...

## (2) Is this type of revelation new or unusual?

<sup>10</sup>... why do you [Jesus] speak to the crowds in **parables**? ...<sup>11</sup> Because *it has been given to you [disciples] to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given ... that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah, saying: I will open my mouth in parables: I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.* (excerpts from **Mt.13:10-17, 34-35**) Jesus was revealing **truth**, but it is intentionally **in a story form** that people in general did not understand. He tells his disciples that they have been particularly blessed with knowledge that *many prophets and righteous people longed for (v.16-17)* but were denied because [my guess] it was not yet time, but once the kingdom of heaven began to descend upon the land, the time was right. (**Lk.3:6**)

The Bible has much to say about **mysteries**. The disciples themselves seemed to understand little of what Jesus said and taught. The author of Hebrews speaks of continuing lack of understanding as a sign of immaturity and relates it to failure to develop morally. <sup>11</sup> *About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.* <sup>12</sup> *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,* <sup>13</sup> *for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.* <sup>14</sup> **But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.** (**Heb.5: 11-14**)

There was another reason for the Jews' lack of understanding, that was judicially imposed - The

minds of the Israelites in Moses day *were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. (2 Cor.3:14-16 )*

### **(3) What does the NT say the OT reveals about Christ and His Work?**

**Christocentric Theology** is built around promise fulfillment rather than dispensations or covenants

**Acts 2:25-31** *David said concerning Christ ... he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to Hades nor did His flesh see corruption.*

**Jn.5:39, 45-47** *Jesus said you search the Scriptures because you think that you have eternal life in them, and it is they that bear witness about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me ... Moses wrote of Me.*

**Acts 8:35** *Philip ... heard the Ethiopian reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, Do you understand what you are reading? And he said, How can I unless someone guides me? ... Philip ... beginning with this Scripture (Isa.53:7-8 ) told him the good news about Jesus [that this passage (and others) referred to Jesus].*

**Acts 10:42-43** *Jesus of Nazareth is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the Prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.*

**Rom.3:21-22** *the law and the prophets bear witness to the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ*

**Acts 26:22-23** *I am saying what the Prophets [OT] and Moses [OC] said*

**Acts 26:6** *I am on trial today because of my hope in what God has promised our forefathers [Abraham, etc]*

**Lk.24:44-47** *everything that is written about Me [Jesus] in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms [whole OT] must be fulfilled ... Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations ...*

**I Cor.15:3-4** *Christ died for our sins In accordance with the Scriptures, He was buried, He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*

We can draw the conclusion then, that Christ and his work represent **the focal point of the OT**. The OT provides the background and points us to the revelation of the NT. The heart of the NT is Christ and his work, and these verses say the same is true of the OT.

### **(4) When the promises, prophecies, and images are fulfilled in the NT,**

we see them mature into reality - they are upgraded as they are transformed – spoken of as better, superior, stronger, more glorious (**Heb.6:9; 7:19, 8: 6, 22; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24**)

**Heb.9:8-9** *[speaking of the covenant with Israel, the tabernacle, its accouterments and services] the Holy Spirit was indicating that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest while*

the first tabernacle was still standing. **It was symbolic for** [what would be clarified in] **the present time**. Accordingly, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of [forgive] the worshiper.

**Col.2:16-17** ... questions of food and drink or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths [Old Covenant regulations] are a shadow of things to come, but **the substance is of Christ**.

**Heb.8:1b-2** ... We have a high priest [Jesus] seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent [not the mere copy and shadow representing it that the priests on earth serve, **v.4-5a**].

**The Old Testament hid spiritual realities in the shadow form of its language**, hence the adage Christ is in the Old Testament **concealed** and in the New **revealed**. Hebrews presses several arguments as to the superiority of Christ, his position, and accomplishments over other bearers of God's word (angels; Moses) in order to contrast the many Old Covenant [referring to the law] forms, figures, shadows, and representative copies with the actual realities.

So concerning the furnishings of the tabernacle, God said see that you [Moses] make them after the pattern ... shown you [on mount Sinai where he received the law] **Ex.25:40**. Our forefathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness just as God directed Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen. (**Acts 7:44**)

Christ is seated with God in the heavens ... ministering in the true sanctuary of the actual tabernacle (**Heb.8:1-2**);

Priests serve a shadow and copy of the heavenly things (**8:5**); Christ has entered into heaven itself - the true, not the OT copy (**9:24**); the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form [icon, picture, image] of those realities. (**10:1**) The physical structure of the earthly sanctuary and the furnishings, ordinances, and services of the first (Old) Covenant (**Heb.9:1-7**) were temporary and symbolic (**v.9**) until the time of reformation. (**v.10**) The true way into God's presence was not made known (**v.8**) until the New Covenant was established (**v.15**). **Old Covenant sacrifices were a pattern or illustration of what Christ was to do IN FACT.** (**Heb.9:23-24; 10:1**)

So what are we to conclude from all this? With the exception of certain Gospel passages and the bulk of the NT, most of the Bible is engaged in both revealing and hiding God's mysteries which focus on Christ and his work.

The Old Covenant describes the relationship between God and his people - **Israelites**. **The New Covenant in Christ's blood describes the new relationship between Christ and his people - Christians**. The Old Testament includes the OC Law, prophecies, historic accounts, and other writings before the Gospels. The New Testament begins with a transition period in the Gospels during which the OC law and OT prophecies were fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Christ.

Revelation presents itself as the climax of prophecy, drawing together the images that pervade OT promises and prophetic visions and bringing them to fulfillment. The **beast** that emerges from the sea in **Rev.13** is a composite of the four beasts of **Dan.7**. In addition to prophetic literature, Revelation's symbolic vocabulary also draws from other parts of the OT. The **tree of life** in paradise at the dawn of biblical history (**Gen.2:9**) reappears at the consummation of the age (**Rev.2:7; 22:2**). This

study is a short example of the way I expect the other lines of thought from these categories will work out. What we are looking for when a promise is given, instruction, or reason is **a temporary physical fulfillment that portends a later spiritual fulfillment and concludes in an ultimate complete fulfillment resulting in a permanent spiritual condition**. When considering **the theme of salvation**, there are several terms or phrases that help keep us on track: rest; peace; restoring your fortunes; the idea of gathering; and the continual contrasting the wicked from the righteous.

This work sticks to Johnson's conclusions and omits much of reasoning and discussion of alternative views. This translation makes an effort to let us know where participles are used = *the one who is coming v.4; the one loving us and having released us v.5*.

Since **Revelation makes sense only in the light of the OT, to study the book is to study the OT apocalyptic images from which it derives its symbolism**, including names and numbers. This necessarily means spending a good deal of time cross-referencing. Our job is essentially the same no matter what Scripture we attempt to understand. We must determine (1) what does it say (or picture) and (2) what does it mean by what it says (or pictures).

The call to **perseverance** is obeyed through evangelistic confrontation with the culture. **Revelation reveals what has been going on behind the scenes of the events in world history**. The visions of **Rev.12-19** symbolize these various avenues of assault upon the church. This work is based largely upon the principles of anticipation and repetition (**p.27- 42**) of Johnson's book, and focus (**p.49-50**).

*Rev.1:4 John, to the seven churches [v.11] in Asia: <sup>D</sup> Grace to you and peace from the One **Who is** and **Who was** and **Who is coming**, and from the seven Spirits that are before His throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ—the Faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. To the One loving us and having released us from our sins by His blood —<sup>6</sup> and He made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever, amen. <sup>7</sup> Behold, He is coming with the clouds <sup>E</sup> [This statement together with the next 2 verbs in the future tense refer to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.], and every eye will see Him— even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth [both Israelites and gentiles] will beat their breasts [mourn, expresses deep sorrow] over Him [**Zech.12:10, 12; Gen.22:18; 26:4**]. Yes! Amen! <sup>8</sup> I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, the One Who is and Who was and Who is coming, the Almighty ...*

<sup>12</sup> And having turned, **I saw** [1<sup>st</sup> vision] **seven golden lampstands**. <sup>13</sup> And in the midst of the lampstands I saw One resembling a son of man having been dressed in a robe reaching to the feet, and having been girded with a golden belt at the breasts. <sup>14</sup> And His head and hair were white like white wool, like snow. And His eyes were like a flame of fire. <sup>15</sup> And His feet resembled brass, like something having been refined in a furnace. And His voice was like the sound of many waters. <sup>16</sup> And He was holding **seven stars** in His right hand. And a sharp double-edged sword was coming out of His mouth. And His face was like the sun shines in its power. [ **Revelation's visions show us how things are, not how they physically appear.**] **Rev. 12-19**

<sup>17</sup> And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. And He placed His right hand upon me saying **Do not fear**. I am the First and the Last, <sup>18</sup> and the One living. <sup>F</sup> And I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever. And **I have the keys of death and Hades** [to unlock the



grave and release its captives].<sup>19</sup> Therefore **write the things that you saw** [2 categories: present and future], **and the things that are** [diagnosis in **chaps. 2 & 3**], **and the things that are destined to take place after these things** (4:1).<sup>20</sup> As to the mystery of the seven stars that you saw upon My right hand and the seven golden lampstands — **the seven stars are** [represent] **angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are seven churches.**

<sup>2:1</sup> To the angel <sup>G</sup> of the church in **Ephesus**, write— These things says the One holding on to the seven stars in His right hand, the One walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. <sup>2</sup> I know your works and labor and your endurance, and that you cannot bear with evil ones. And you tested the ones calling themselves apostles (and they are not) and you found them to be false. <sup>3</sup> And you have endurance, and bore-up for the sake of My name, and have not become weary. <sup>4</sup> But I have against you that you left your first love. <sup>5</sup> Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the first works. Otherwise, I am coming to you. And I will move your lampstand from its place unless you repent. <sup>6</sup> But this you have — that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup> Let the one having an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To the one overcoming, I will give him authority to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.

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<sup>D</sup> Rev. is addressed to the West Coast churches in Asia Minor in the first century. **Each letter is what the Spirit says to all the churches.** These 7 churches represent the totality of Christ's churches scattered across the world and over time. Collectively it is **a church that is under attack to show to his bond-servants things that must quickly (1:3; 22:6) take place** because *the time is near (1:3; 22:10)* in order to fortify Jesus' followers in steadfast hope and holy living. *Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book. (Rev.22:6-7)*

<sup>E</sup> **Daniel's vision refers to the Son of Man approaching heaven (Dan.7:13-14, 27);** Jesus uses the same language to speak of his resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand where **he was invested with universal authority** (coronation) as the victorious Messiah, **Mk.8:38; 14:62; Mt.16:27; 26:64; Lk.9:26.** His right to open the scroll (**Rev.5**) shows this.

<sup>F</sup> The Lord calls himself *the first, last, and living one* to contrast himself with idols.

<sup>G</sup> **The angels are not distinct spiritual beings charged with the welfare of the churches. They symbolize churches.**

**The most significant pattern in the book is the movement from conflict to victory.**

<sup>2:18</sup> And to the angel of the church in **Thyatira**, write— These things says the Son of God, the One having His eyes like a flame of fire and His feet resembling brass. <sup>19</sup> I know your works and love and faith and service and your endurance. And your last works are greater than the first. <sup>20</sup> But I have against you that you are tolerating **the woman Jezebel** — the one calling herself a prophet. And she is teaching and misleading My slaves to commit sexual immorality and eat foods sacrificed to idols. *[She is a concrete local expression of the worldwide, history-long threat symbolized in the harlot, the subtle pressure to cultural conformity and the seductive rewards it brings in financial and social security.]* <sup>21</sup> And I gave her time in order that she might repent. And she is not willing to repent from her sexual immorality. <sup>22</sup> Behold, I am throwing her into a bed, and the ones commit-

ting adultery with her into a great affliction, unless they repent from her works. <sup>23</sup> And I will kill her children ... And all the churches will know that I am the One searching minds and hearts, and I will give to you, to each one, according to your works. <sup>24</sup> But I say to you, to the rest in Thyatira— all who are not holding this teaching, who did not know the deep things of Satan (as they say): I am not putting another burden upon you. <sup>25</sup> However, hold on to what you have until whenever I come. <sup>26</sup> And the one overcoming and the one keeping My works until the end — I will give him authority over the nations. <sup>27</sup> And he will shepherd them those have received from My Father. And I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> Let the one having an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

<sup>3:7</sup> And to the angel of the church in **Philadelphia**, write — These things says the Holy One, the True One, the One having the key of David [*Jesus is the royal heir of David with authority over the messianic kingdom, pictured here as the city - sanctuary of God*], the One opening and no one will shut, and shutting and no one opens. <sup>8</sup> I know your works. Behold, I have given before you an opened door [*access to the Father related to our witness*] (that no one is able to shut). Because you have a little power, and you kept My word, and you did not deny My name, <sup>9</sup> behold, I am giving some from the synagogue of Satan, the ones saying that they are Jews (and they are not), but they are lying. Behold, I will make them so that they will come and worship before your feet, and they may know that I loved you. <sup>10</sup> Because you kept the word of My endurance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, the hour going to come upon the whole world to test the ones dwelling upon the earth. <sup>11</sup> I am coming quickly. Be holding on to what you have in order that no one may take your crown. <sup>12</sup> The one overcoming— I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will never go outside again. And I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God — the new Jerusalem, the one coming down out of heaven from My God — and My new name.<sup>H13</sup> Let the one having an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

<sup>4:1</sup> **After these things** <sup>I</sup> saw [*focus shifts to the future of the 7 churches and the forces that assault them*], and behold— there was an opened door in heaven [*beginning of a new vision cycle* <sup>I</sup>], and the first voice that I heard speaking with me like [*the sound*] of a trumpet saying, Come up here and I will show you the things that must take place after these things (**1:19**).

<sup>2</sup> Immediately I came to be in the Spirit. And behold [*vision blends features from the early prophets' visions*] — a throne was setting there in heaven,<sup>J</sup> and One sitting on the throne [*echoes Daniel's vision (Dan.7:9) and will be repeated in the martyr's reign (Rev.20:4)*]. <sup>3</sup> And **the One sitting** resembled a jasper stone and a carnelian in appearance. And a rainbow was around the throne resembling an emerald in appearance [*replicates a feature of Ezekiel's opening vision, Ez.1:28*].

<sup>4</sup> And around the throne I saw twenty-four thrones. And on the thrones I saw **twenty-four elders**<sup>K</sup> sitting, having been clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. <sup>5</sup> And lightnings and voices and thunders are coming out from the throne (**Ex.19:16**). And seven torches of fire are burning before the throne (which are the seven Spirits of God) [*symbolizing the fullness of the Spirit's presence with the Father*].

<sup>6</sup> And before the throne is something [*so tranquil it seems*] like a sea of glass,<sup>L</sup> resembling crystal [*shows the peaceful purity of God's sanctuary in contrast to the restless earthly sea, a region of rebellion, the source and symbol of satanic chaos*]. And in the midst of the throne and around the

throne are **four living creatures**<sup>M</sup> full of eyes on the front and on the back. <sup>7</sup> And **the first living creature** resembles a lion. And **the second living creature** resembles a calf. And **the third living creature** has the face like of a man. And **the fourth living creature** resembles a flying eagle. <sup>8</sup> And the four living creatures, each one of them has six wings apiece, are full of eyes around and inside [like the wheels associated with Ezekiel's living creatures (**Ez.1:18**) reflecting the omniscience of the one they worship]. And they do not have a rest by day and by night, saying Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, the One Who was and Who is and Who is coming. <sup>9</sup> And whenever the living creatures will give glory and honor and thanks to the One sitting on the throne, to the One living forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> **the twenty four elders**<sup>K</sup> will fall before the One sitting on the throne, and will give worship to the One living forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying <sup>11</sup> You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, because You created all things. And they existed and were created because of Your will.

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<sup>H</sup> Symbolizes all that Christ is by virtue of his redemptive work for mankind.

<sup>I</sup> Transition that marks the beginning of a significant new vision (7:1, 9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1)

<sup>J</sup> Subsequent openings of heaven (19:11) and of God's sanctuary in heaven (11:19; 15:5) open new visionary scenes.

<sup>K</sup> The elders function as angels do elsewhere – as agents of revelation and explanation to John. They are the council of the Lord's heavenly servants, the advisors.

<sup>L</sup> appeared in various forms to earlier prophets (to Moses, Aaron, Aaron's sons, and Israel's leaders it appeared as a pavement of clear sapphire, **Ex.24:10**). Ezekiel saw an expanse (**Ez.1:22, 26**) and it will reappear as a transparent pavement (**Rev.15:2**).

<sup>M</sup> share characteristics with the cherubim Ezekiel saw (**Ez.10:20**). They also resemble seraphim in Isaiah's vision (**Isa.6:2-3**).

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There is no necessary connection between the order of the visions as John recorded them and the order of the events symbolized in the visions. They are not a chronologically arranged timeline of history. (Compare **6:12-13** with **8:12** and note the stylistic device of repetition or recapitulation.)

**Scripture is dynamic** in the various categories [promise; judgment; blessing; prophecy; law; construction, fabrication, and decoration details (ie tabernacle; priests garments); procedural directions (ie order of march, assembly and disassembly of the tabernacle; sequence of events governing special days and occasions (ie Day of Atonement); etc]. **There is a movement or progression toward a goal or fulfillment of God's redemptive plan.** There are a number of books that touch on various aspects of this. **It is a movement from shadow or type to reality.** This has been called **Prophesied and Fulfilled Theology**, and most recently has come to be expressed as **New Covenant Theology**. [See under **What Is New Covenant Theology? Part Three** John G. Reisinger <http://www.sound-ofgrace.com/jgr/> **Baptists and Their Doctrines** chap.1, **Distinctive Baptist principles** by B.H. Carroll, edited (1913)]

**We are often prone to ask the wrong questions – when instead of what and why ?** The prolonged



process of preparing to unroll the scroll [breaking the seals] presents a series of portraits that answer the question, *Why if the Lion-Lamb has conquered does the world continue to be a place of evil, violence, and misery?* **Not until all 7 are broken are the events prescribed disclosed.** The 1<sup>st</sup> 4 seals belong together (as do the 1<sup>st</sup> 4 trumpets and bowls). They show the instruments that the Lamb uses to judge those who oppose his rule and oppress his church.

*<sup>6:1</sup> And I saw when the Lamb opened **the first of the seven seals**, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying like a voice of thunder, Come. <sup>2</sup> And I saw, and behold— there was **a white horse**, and the one sitting on it having a bow. And a crown was given to him. And he went out conquering, and in order that he might conquer. [not Christ]*

The colors of the horses roughly correspond to those of the chariot horses in **Zech.6:1-8** which symbolized the **4 spirits** [winds] of heaven sent to the 4 points of the compass bringing judgment on the nations that had oppressed Judah. John also sees **4 horses and riders** galloping through the earth to wreck havoc on God's enemies – a restrained expression of the Lamb's wrath through human aggression. The expansionist aspirations of rulers precipitate military conflict and scarcity of such resources as food and medicine, leading to malnutrition, starvation, epidemic, and death. This is a portrait of human avarice for power that serves as God's instrument of judgment.

*<sup>3</sup> And when He opened **the second seal**, I heard **the second living creature** saying, Come. <sup>4</sup> And **a fire-red horse** — went out. And to the one sitting on it, authority was given to him to take the peace from the earth, and that they will slay one another. And a great sword was given to him. <sup>5</sup> And when He opened **the third seal**, I heard **the third living creature** saying, Come. And I saw, and behold — there was **a black horse**, and the one sitting on it holding a balance scale in his hand. <sup>6</sup> And I heard something like a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius. [Prices are inflated by severely reduced supply.] And do not harm the olive oil and the wine.*

Though famine can be brought on by natural causes such as drought or infestation, here the scarcity of sustenance-level food supplies should be attributed to the conditions of war – disrupting trade and transportation during siege. Limitations of various kinds distinguish restricted, anticipatory expressions of the wrath of the Lamb throughout history from the unrestrained display of his judgment at the end of history. The restrained and partial judgment of John's visions show us symbols of the course of ordinary history between the comings of Christ. The dangers and disasters that shatter and dismantle arrogant civilizations (Rome in John's day) that are symbolized in the 4 horsemen and most of the trumpets, are **the Lamb's providential instruments of pre-wrath wrath and prejudgment justice**, foreshadowing the end when God's victory over his enemies will be total.

*<sup>7</sup> And when He opened **the fourth seal**, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, Come. <sup>8</sup> And I saw, and behold— there was **a pale green** [pale greenish gray signifying the pallor of illness; different from dappled, **Zech.6:3**] **horse**, and the one sitting on it. Death was the name for him. [portraying the grisly effects of the preceding 3 seals] And Hades was following with him. And authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence [Gk, death, here in the sense of epidemic disease (like famine) is war's toxic byproduct spreading death among those who survive the bloodshed] and by the wild beasts of the earth.*

[Lk.21:9-11; Ez.14:12-21. The churches of Asia must realize that Christ the sovereign will send all sorts of limited judgments on the Roman imperial system.]

The breaking of the 5<sup>th</sup> seal opens a window on the rationale that lies behind the release of the horses of judgment.

<sup>9</sup> And when He opened **the fifth seal**, I saw under the altar [The vision shifts from earth to heaven where John sees a single altar that serves the purpose of both altars in the earthly shadow sanctuary. Here it appears as the altar where animal sacrifices were made.] the souls of the ones having been slain because of the word of God and because of the testimony that they were holding. <sup>10</sup> And they cried out with a loud voice, saying **How long, holy and true Master, are You not judging and avenging our blood from the ones dwelling upon the earth?** <sup>11</sup> And a white robe was given to them, to each one. And it was told to them that they shall rest a short time longer, until also the number of their fellow bond-servants and their brothers going to be killed as also they, may be completed.

<sup>12</sup> And I saw when He opened **the sixth seal**. And a great earthquake took place. And the sun became black like a sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood, <sup>13</sup> and the stars of the heaven fell to the earth— as a fig tree being shaken by a great wind throws its late figs. <sup>14</sup> And the heaven was split like a scroll being rolled up. And every mountain and island was moved out of its place. [confirmation that the end will come certainly and suddenly - the unlimited display of God's wrath in the dissolution of the universe at the climax of history] <sup>15</sup> And the kings of the earth and the princes and the commanders and the rich and the powerful and every slave and free one hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains. <sup>16</sup> And they are saying to the mountains and the rocks, Fall upon us and hide us from the face of the One sitting on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, <sup>17</sup> because the great day of Their wrath came, and who is able to stand? [In answer to this question, John receives **a double vision of the protected and triumphant followers of Christ**.]

<sup>7:1</sup> **After this<sup>1</sup> I saw four angels** standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth in order that a wind might not blow on the land, nor on the sea, nor against any tree. <sup>2</sup> And I saw **another angel** coming up from the rising of the sun, **having a seal of the living God**. And he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom authority was given to them to harm the land and the sea, <sup>3</sup> saying Do not harm the land nor the sea nor the trees until we **seal** the bondservants of our God upon their foreheads [not a visible mark, symbolizes protection from deception]. <sup>4</sup> And I heard the number of the ones having been sealed [with the names of Christ and of God implying security from God's wrath under his protective authority, **14:1**], one hundred forty four thousand [representing the entire company of the victors; not a Jewish remnant], having been **sealed** from every tribe of the sons of Israel — <sup>5</sup> from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand having been **sealed** ... Reuben ... Gad ... <sup>6</sup> Asher ... Naphtali ... Manasseh <sup>7</sup> ... Simeon ... Levi ... Issachar ... <sup>8</sup> from the tribe of Zebulun ... Joseph ... Benjamin, twelve thousand having been **sealed**.

**Sounds like** a precisely numbered, exclusively Israelite army braced for battle **but looks like** a vast international crowd celebrating the victory already won.

<sup>9</sup> After these things I saw, and behold — there was a great multitude (no one was able to number

it) from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, having been clothed with white robes [revealing them to be **the martyrs whose souls John saw beneath the altar, 6:9-11. The lamenting martyrs (the victorious church in heaven) and the celebrating victors (the faithful church on earth) are the same group viewed from different perspectives.** The key difference is not in their ethnic composition, but in their location.], and palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> And they are crying out with a loud voice, saying Salvation belongs to our God sitting on the throne and to the Lamb. <sup>11</sup> And **all the angels** were standing around the throne and **the elders and the four living-creatures**. And they fell on their faces before the throne and gave worship to God, <sup>12</sup> saying Amen. The blessing and the glory and the wisdom and the thanksgiving and the honor and the power and the strength be to our God forever and ever, amen. <sup>13</sup> And one of the elders responded, saying to me, These ones having been clothed with the white robes — who are they, and from where did they come?

<sup>14</sup> And I said to him, My lord, you know. And he said to me, **These are the ones coming out of the great affliction. And they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.** <sup>15</sup> For this reason, they are before the throne of God, and they are serving Him by day and by night in His temple. And the One sitting on the throne will dwell over them. <sup>16</sup> They will not hunger anymore, nor thirst anymore, nor may the sun fall upon them, nor any scorching heat. <sup>17</sup> Because **the Lamb at the center of the throne** will shepherd them, and guide them to springs of the waters of life. And **God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.**

The **seal visions** profile forces that will be at work in the cycle of **trumpet judgments**. The message of the **trumpet visions** is a warning to the complacent, calling them to repentance and summoning the church to holy spiritual warfare – wars must happen, but the end is not yet.

<sup>8:1</sup> And when He opened **the seventh seal**, a silence took place in heaven for about a half hour. [The 4 living creatures (4:8), the 24 elders (4:11), the new songs of praise (5:9-14), the martyr's lament (6:10), and their song of salvation (7:10, 15), **all silent as creation anticipates the Lord's impending arrival in judgment. It is the calm before the storm.**] <sup>2</sup> And I saw **the seven angels** who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. <sup>3</sup> And **another angel** came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer. And much incense was given to him so that he will give it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne. <sup>4</sup> And **the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints**, went up from the hand of the angel before God. <sup>5</sup> And the angel has taken the censer, and he filled it from the fire of the altar <sup>N</sup> and threw it to the earth. And there came thunders and voices and lightnings and an earthquake. <sup>6</sup> And the seven angels having the seven trumpets prepared themselves in order that they might trumpet.

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<sup>N</sup> In the tabernacle and temple, the altar of incense stood immediately outside the veil separating the holiest place from the outer chamber (6:9). The altar of burnt offering was located in the court. In this heavenly vision, **John sees the incense altar standing before the ark without a partition.**  
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As the trumpets sound, we begin to see the effects of the riders released with the breaking of the 1<sup>st</sup> 4 seals.

<sup>7</sup> And **the first trumpeted**, and there came hail and fire having been mixed with blood [symbolic of violence, shows this judgment is associated with warfare – reminiscent of the red horse on which War rides, 6:4], and it was thrown to the land. And a third of the land was burned up, and a third of the trees was burned up, and all the green grass was burned up [raising price levels as Famine rode forth, 6:6].

<sup>8</sup> And **the second angel trumpeted**, and something like [John reminds his readers that his description is only a rough approximation of the vision.] a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea [implying a heavenly origin]. <sup>9</sup> And a third of the **sea** became blood. And a third of the **creatures in the sea**, the ones having life, died. And a third of the **ships** were destroyed [symbolic of disruption of the trade network that kept Rome, the Babylon of John's day, afloat].

<sup>10</sup> And **the third angel trumpeted**, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch. And it fell on a third of the **rivers**, and on the **springs** of waters. <sup>11</sup> And the name of the star is called Wormwood. And a third of the **waters** became wormwood. And many of the people died from the waters, because they were made bitter. [Once again the confluence of biblical symbolism is the key to understanding this strange picture ie, wormwood's bitter taste is emblematic of poison, Jer.9:15.]

<sup>12</sup> And **the fourth angel trumpeted**, and a third of the **sun** was struck, and a third of the **moon**, and a third of the **stars**, so that a third of them might be darkened, and the day might not shine for a third of it, and the night likewise. [symbolizes providential disasters that precede the final cataclysm] [John's wording warns us not to envision how this judgment would work physically ie, don't picture a 33% reduction in size of the sun and moon or number of stars, or in their luminosity, or even the proportionate hours during which they shine. Attempting to pin down such details represents a misunderstanding of the visionary genre. A literal referent for the judgment may be found in the blackening of the skies by the smoke of burning fields and smoldering cities, sacked and put to the torch by their military conquerors.

<sup>13</sup> And I saw, and I heard **one eagle flying** in mid-heaven, saying with a loud voice. **Woe (9:12), woe, woe** for the ones dwelling upon the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the **trumpet of the three angels** being about to trumpet! [The last 3 trumpets are woes for people in rebellion against God and Christ, in contrast to the church.]

<sup>9:1</sup> And **the fifth angel trumpeted**<sup>1</sup>, and I saw **a star from heaven** having fallen to the earth. And **the key of the shaft of the abyss** was given to him [The fallen star is the king (12:7-9; Lk.10:18) cast out of heaven to the earth - the angel of the abyss (v.11) aka the dragon, ancient serpent, the devil, and Satan (20:2). He is given royal authority to command and control the occupants of the abyss – He releases his demons to torment the unbelieving, v.4]. <sup>2</sup> And he opened **the shaft of the abyss**. And smoke went up from the shaft like the smoke of a great furnace. And the sun and the air was darkened by the smoke of the shaft. <sup>3</sup> And **locusts** came out of the smoke to the earth (Ex.10:14-15; Joel 2:1-2). And authority was given to them as the scorpions of the earth have authority. <sup>4</sup> And it was told to them that they shall not harm the grass of the land, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> And authority was given to them so that they might not kill them, but so that they will be tormented for five months. And their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a person. <sup>6</sup> And



during those days the people will seek death, and will by no means find it; and they will desire to die, and death flees from them [symbolizes demonic torment inflicted on the minds and souls of non-Christians].

<sup>7</sup> And the likenesses of the locusts were like horses having been prepared for battle. And on their heads were something like crowns resembling gold. And their faces were like faces of people.

<sup>8</sup> And they had hair like the hair of women. And their teeth were like ones of lions. <sup>9</sup> And they had breastplates like iron breastplates. And the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses running into battle (Joel 2:3-5). <sup>10</sup> And they have tails like scorpions, and stingers. And their authority to harm people for five months is in their tails. <sup>11</sup> They have a king over them: **the angel of the abyss**. The name for him in Hebrew is **Abaddon**. And in Greek he has the name **Apollyon** [Destroyer].

<sup>12</sup> The **first woe** (8:13) passed away [ This outbreak of demonic activity among the unbelieving carries the expression of God's wrath in the course of history to a new level.]. Behold— two woes are still coming after these things.

<sup>13</sup> And **the sixth angel trumpeted** [The 2<sup>nd</sup> woe that previews an increase of satanic deception that precipitates growing violence, death, and despair.] And I heard one voice from the four horns of **the golden altar** before God <sup>14</sup> saying to the sixth angel, the one having the trumpet, "Release the four angels having been bound at the great river Euphrates." [Do not be misled to think in terms of geographical literalism. Recognize the symbolic character of this VISION.] <sup>15</sup> And **the four angels** were released, the ones having been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, in order that they might kill a third of **mankind** [marks the end of a period of restraint of God's judgment]. <sup>16</sup> And the number of the troops of cavalry was two hundred million. [The invasion comes with the release of the angels from their bondage representing a restraining boundary holding back impending judgment.] I heard the number of them. <sup>17</sup> And I saw the horses and the ones sitting on them in the vision as follows— having breastplates [the color] of fire and of hyacinth and of sulfur. And the heads of the horses are like heads of lions. And fire and smoke and sulfur are coming out of their mouths. [In this invasion it is not the riders that are to be feared, but the horses that wield death through the hellish deceit that pours from their mouths.] <sup>18</sup> A third of mankind was killed from these three plagues— by the fire and the smoke and the sulfur coming out of their mouths. <sup>19</sup> For the authority of the horses is in their mouth and in their tails. For their tails are like snakes, having heads, and with them they do harm. <sup>20</sup> And the rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues, they did not even repent from the works of their hands, so-that they will not worship demons and idols— the golden ones and the silver ones and the brass ones and the stone ones and the wooden ones— which are neither able to see, nor to hear, nor to walk. <sup>21</sup> And they did not repent from their murders, or from their sorcerer's potions, or from their sexual immorality, or from their thefts.

There is a complex series of visions between the 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> trumpets (10:1-11:13). John sees *another strong angel* with an open scroll that he is to eat in preparation for his prophetic ministry (10:1-11). The words and actions of this angel complete the chain of transmission outlined in 1:1, for **here the revelation of Jesus Christ is symbolically entrusted to John**, completing his commissioning as a spokesman for the risen Lord. <sup>10:1</sup> [alludes to the angel who posed the question earlier *Who is*

worthy to open the book? 5:2] coming down from heaven, having been clothed with a **cloud**. And the **rainbow** was over his head, and his face was like the **sun**, and his feet were like **pillars of fire**. And I saw **another strong angel** [He resembles the glories of God and the Son of Man - the radiance by which God led Israel through the wilderness (Ex.13:21-22; 14:24) p.157-159] <sup>2</sup> And he was holding in his hand an opened little scroll [the Lamb had opened it, chap.6-8]. And he placed his right foot upon the sea [8:8-9] and the left one upon the land [8:7, laying claim to the environmental spheres afflicted under the 1<sup>st</sup> two trumpets], <sup>3</sup> and he cried out with a loud voice as indeed a lion roars [announcing the Lord's wrath]. And when he cried out, the seven thunders spoke their voices. <sup>4</sup> And when **the seven thunders spoke**, I was about to write. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Seal the things which the seven thunders spoke, and do not write them [time has finally run out]. <sup>5</sup> And the angel whom I saw standing upon the sea and upon the land lifted up his right hand to heaven [invoking God as witness] <sup>6</sup> and swore by the One living forever and ever— Who created the heaven and the things in it, and the land and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it— that there will be no more time [delay].

An **interlude is inserted between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> trumpets** (as between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> seals) to dramatize the delay of final judgment. **The seal cycle** showed that the Lamb's delay of judgment entails a postponement of the martyrs' vindication (6:9-11). **The trumpet cycle** portrayed the restrained ravages of war affecting only a third of earth, sea, rivers, and sky: the Lord's longsuffering alarms summoning earth's inhabitants to repentance (9:21). When the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet sounds, however, no cycle of thunder judgments further delaying the end will follow. When the 7<sup>th</sup>, the last trumpet sounds (1 Cor.15:52), no further opportunity for repentance will remain. Unlike the command to Daniel to seal his prophetic words until a distant time to which they referred (Dan.12:4, 8-9), John is to seal the thunders' speech forever. **God will not allow an endless cycle of injustice and misery; in fact he hastens his people's relief (Lk18:7-8).**

<sup>7</sup> But during the days of **the sound of the seventh angel**, when he is about to trumpet, **the mystery of God was indeed finished** [The trumpet blast precipitates the pouring out of the bowls containing the 7 last plagues, rapid-fire in succession and comprehensive in extent, 15:1; 16], as He announced as good news to His bondservants, the prophets. <sup>8</sup> And the voice that I heard from heaven was again speaking with me, and saying Go, take the opened scroll in the hand of the angel standing upon the sea and upon the land. <sup>9</sup> And I went to the angel, telling him to give me **the little scroll**. And he says to me, Take, and eat it up. And it will make your stomach bitter. But in your mouth it will be sweet like honey [resembles Ezekiel's commissioning, Ez.2:8-3:3]. <sup>10</sup> And I took the little scroll out of the hand of the angel, and **I ate it up**. And it was like sweet honey in my mouth. And when I ate it, my stomach was made bitter.

a bitter message in 2 respects, (1) It is double edged concerning the **nations (v.11)**; (2) **John's message to and about the church is a blend of bitterness and sweetness**. He will soon be told of a **witness church** that is invincible – shielded from God's wrath and protected by his power from the wrath of its enemies (11:5-6), but then vulnerable to the attack of the beast from the abyss (11:7-8). **Paradoxically the witness church's defeat in suffering and death at the hands of its enemies is its supreme victory (12:11).**

<sup>11</sup> And they say to me, You must prophesy again for many peoples and nations and tongues and

kings.

In **chap.11-13** the time frame associated with **the woman's desert retreat** is measured in three distinct but synonymous ways: 42 months (**11:2; 13:5**); 1,260 days (**11:3; 12:6**); or 3½ years (**12:14**). The same time periods are being symbolized throughout these three chapters. The additional *time & times and half a time* makes explicit allusion to the period of the saint's persecution under the 4<sup>th</sup> beast in **Dan.7:25**. **This era is characterized by persecution of the church** (called holy city, heavenly woman) by its enemies, and the protection of the church by its God (measuring the sanctuary, refuge in the wilderness).

**11:1** And **a measuring-rod** resembling a staff (v.3) *was given to me, saying Arise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and the ones worshiping in it* [**the NT redefinition of the sanctuary of God as the people of God**]. <sup>2</sup> *And put the court outside of the temple on the outside, and do not measure it, because it was given to the Gentiles. And they will trample the holy city for forty and two months* [**alludes to Jesus' prediction of the fall of Jerusalem** (70 AD), **Lk.21:24**]. <sup>3</sup> *And I [Jesus] will give authority (staff, v. 1) to my two witnesses* <sup>P</sup> (Gk. *martyrs*; **2:13; 17:6** entrusted with the testimony [Gk. *martyria* **1:2, 9**] of Jesus, the faithful witness, **1:5**), and **they will prophesy** for one thousand two hundred sixty days, having been clothed with sackcloth.

### TRUTH, HONESTY & OTHER COMPETING MOTIVES

None of us starts off with the certainty that we know or were taught 100% correctly. Institutions that we find ourselves in, or a part of, must have a way for us to work these things out together. Some are threatened by a view that differs from their own. Through the years I have noticed that **the search for truth has been made secondary by personal issues**. Here are some examples. **I mentioned to a friend who worked for a certain missions group that I had a good book on Revelation that had a perspective different from his. He wasn't interested in reading it because he liked the people he worked with and the organization.** In other words **he felt that seeking the truth and arriving at a different conclusion would jeopardize his job and friendships**. He taught Bible classes for that organization as part of his job. **I knew another man who was committed to a certain doctrinal position by virtue of his church membership and is a Christian college professor.** He always gave me the impression that he would not consider anything that jeopardized that status. These things bother me because there is no room to seek the truth together – no way to work through it together. It rests on the assumption that our **[organization's]** view is correct in all aspects and dissension must be removed for the sake of the maintaining our theological distinctions. It also means that if you find yourself changing your mind (my wife and I have a couple times) you feel the need to hide that fact. **Your motivation becomes fear** and your method of dealing with it is concealment and/or refusal to entertain the notion that you might be wrong which is dishonest.